

COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT REFORM
TOM DAVIS, CHAIRMAN



MEDIA ADVISORY

For Immediate Release

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Contact: Robert White/Drew Crockett (Davis)
(202) 225-5074
Matt Ferraguto (Lynch)
617-428-2007

* * * *Field Hearing in Boston, MA* * * *

Government Reform to Examine “Big Dig” Project

What: Government Reform Committee Oversight Hearing:
“Digging Up the Facts: Inspecting the Big Dig and the Performance of
Federal and State Government in Providing Oversight of Federal Funds”

When: FRIDAY, APRIL 22, 2005 at 2:00 P.M.

Where: John Joseph Moakley Federal Courthouse
En Banc Courtroom, 7th Floor
One Courthouse Way
Boston, MA 02210

*IMPORTANT NOTE: Any member of the press seeking to bring electronic equipment
(cameras, tape recorders, etc.) into the Courtroom must notify Matt Ferraguto in advance.
Please provide the reporter’s name and identify each piece of equipment as soon as possible.*

Background:

The Government Reform Committee is convening this field hearing in Boston, Massachusetts, to discuss the Central Artery/Tunnel Project, better known as “The Big Dig.” In its lifetime, the “Big Dig” has experienced significant schedule delays, drastic cost growth and questions as to the soundness of the construction as a result of numerous leaks that have been discovered in recent months. **In holding this hearing, the Committee hopes to clarify where the project currently stands, what is being done to resolve outstanding concerns and issues, and what actions must be taken by federal and state entities to prevent such problems on future projects.**

In 1959, Boston constructed the John F. Fitzgerald Expressway, better known as the Central Artery. This elevated six-lane highway quickly became one of the most congested highways in the country with an accident rate four times the national average for urban interstate highways. In addition, the Central Artery served as a barrier to economic development, essentially cutting the city in two. To solve these problems, the Central Artery/Tunnel Project replaces the elevated expressway with 7.5 miles of tunnels, surface highways, and bridges, and creates an expanded underground expressway to help relieve congestion.

The project is one of the longest running and most expensive transportation projects in our nation's history. In 1985, the Commonwealth of Massachusetts estimated the total cost of the project to be \$2.6 billion; as of March 31, 2004, \$13.065 billion had been expended on the project. Preliminary design for the project began in the 1980's and construction has been underway since late 1991. As of the beginning of this year, construction was 96 percent complete. The Massachusetts Turnpike Authority (Authority) estimates a completion date of between May and November 2005, including demolition of the elevated highway and restoration of the surface.

Over the past year, interest has focused on the presence of leaks in the I-93 tunnel of the project, raising great concern among the public about the safety of the tunnels and the potential cost of repairs. In December 2004, the Authority had reported 700 water leaks in the I-93 tunnel portion of the project. As of last month, 438 water leaks remain, and the Authority is in the process of inspecting 40,000 points in the tunnels to determine if there are any additional leaks.

In addition, in January of this year, the Authority hired Deloitte & Touche to perform an audit on the project impacts of the tunnel leaks. The audit, scheduled to be completed in June, will assess past and current costs associated with the leaks, liability for all relevant parties, payments made for leak-related costs and amounts recovered to date, expected future maintenance costs, and whether the project's current budget is sufficient to cover current leak-related expenses.

In October 2000, through a provision contained in the Fiscal Year 2001 Department of Transportation and Related Agencies Appropriations Act, Congress limited the total federal financial contribution to the project to \$8.549 billion and directed the Secretary of Transportation to withhold obligations of federal funds and all project approvals until the Office of Inspector General (OIG) determined that the annual finance plan update is consistent with Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) guidance.

Since that time, the OIG has issued yearly audit reports certifying that the annual finance plan for the project is consistent with FHWA financial plan guidance. The audit report for 2004 is pending the conclusion of the Deloitte & Touche audit on the program impact of the tunnel leaks, which will provide a more credible basis for a cost estimate. The release of the remaining \$81 million in FHWA funds for the project is contingent upon this report.

In holding this hearing, the Committee hopes to determine where the project stands and what actions are being taken to address outstanding concerns and issues.

both in terms of safety and of costs. In addition, with the project nearing completion, it is important to assess lessons learned to determine how best to prevent cost growth and improve oversight and coordination for future transportation projects. It is imperative for the federal government, which often pays 80 percent of major highway projects, to do so. While major transportation and infrastructure projects, specifically the Central Artery/Tunnel project, are necessary and provide benefits to the taxpayer, the increase in the number of projects and the rapidly growing competition for both federal and state funding demand that major projects be managed efficiently and cost effectively.

Witness List:

Panel I:

Mr. D.J. Gribbin, Chief Counsel, Federal Highway Administration

Mr. Stanley Gee, Administrator, Massachusetts Division, Federal Highway Administration

The Honorable Kenneth Mead, Inspector General, U.S. Department of Transportation

Panel II:

The Honorable Tom Reilly, Attorney General, Commonwealth of Massachusetts

The Honorable Matthew J. Amorello, Chairman, Massachusetts Turnpike Authority

Mr. John MacDonald, Chairman, Board of Control, Bechtel/Parsons Brinckerhoff

Mr. Morris Levy, Senior Vice President, Parsons Brinckerhoff Inc.

Mr. Keith S. Sibley, P.E., Program Manager – Central Artery/Tunnel Project,
Bechtel/Parsons Brinckerhoff

Mr. George J. Tamaro, Partner, Mueser Rutledge Consulting Engineers

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